National Environmental Public Health Tracking Week

Climate and Health

The climate is a principle aspect of the environment we live in, affecting the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat. Humans are connected to and are a part of their natural environment, meaning that the climate we live in impacts our health and quality of life. The Tracking Network is helping us better understand how the environment is connected to climate, extreme heat, and public health.

The Tracking Network contains data on the following indicators that combine weather and health data to identify patterns in extreme heat and their associated health effects:

- Historical extreme heat days and events
- Heat stress emergency department visits
- Heat stress hospitalizations
- Heat-related mortality
- Temperature distribution

The Connection between Climate Change, Extreme Heat and Health

- On average, extreme heat events are the most common cause of weather-related deaths in the U.S.
- Heat also increases ground-level ozone concentrations, causing direct lung injury and increasing the severity of respiratory diseases such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.
- Climate change is causing these events to occur more intensely with a longer duration.

The Tracking Network data are useful for providing information about who is most at-risk during heat waves. Because of this information, we can make informed decisions and plan how and where to best focus adaptation efforts to protect people from extreme heat. The following groups of people have a higher risk of experiencing negative health effects related to climate change:

- People who are elderly, very young, disabled, poor, or live alone,
- People with existing medical conditions such as heart disease or asthma, and
- People who live in urban areas with high air pollution or in old buildings with poor cooling systems, or have no air conditioning.

To view climate data, please visit the Iowa Public Health Tracking portal at http://pht.idph.state.ia.us or visit CDC's Environmental Public Health Tracking Network.